

USCIRF REPORT MAY PROMPT CONCERNS

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - USA

Nirupama Rao

The government has unequivocally dismissed the US Commission of International Religious Freedom's latest report, which ranks India on the lowest grade of "Countries of Particular Concern", citing the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the proposed National Register for Citizens, both of which were announced by the government in the past year. In its statement this week, the External Affairs Ministry hit back at the USCIRF directly, calling it an "Organisation of Particular Concern", with no "locus standi" or official standing.

The government's stand is consistent with its policy on the USCIRF, which it has refused to cooperate with, and has disallowed its officials to visit India since 2009. The bigger worry this year is the fact that the USCIRF has recommended that India be put on the CPC list by the State Department, which is due to publish its annual report on religious freedom in a few weeks, most likely in May or June.

Former Indian Ambassadors to the U.S. point out that though a CPC designation is unlikely to make any difference to the U.S.-India bilateral relationship on other issues, it would be premature to dismiss the USCIRF's recommendation completely.

"It's wrong to focus just on the statements of the USCIRF on CAA and NRC and other such issues. The question is, who has supported India [in the U.S.] on these issues? No one. One can say that you don't expect there will be reactions to such [domestic Indian] policies. Frankly, that is wishful, unrealistic thinking," Ronen Sen, who was Ambassador in Washington in 2005 when India was removed from the State Departments' CPC list, told *The Hindu*. "There is a reputational issue involved, for India, as the world's largest democracy that draws strength from the protection of diversity," said former Ambassador to Washington Nirupama Menon Rao, stating that the report could not be "ignored outright". "To be clubbed with China and Burma, Pakistan and North Korea as a country of particular concern is unfortunate," she said.

More punitive steps

The decision before U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (who will act on behalf of President Donald Trump) on whether to designate India as a CPC is significant, as it could bring other punitive actions. According to the US IRF Act, the President is obligated to take one of 15 possible actions, ranging from a demarche to cancellation of bilateral exchanges, to travel sanctions against specified officials, within 3-6 months. It was under this determination that the U.S. had banned travel visas for PM Narendra Modi (then Gujarat Chief Minister) in 2005.

Diplomats point out the State department hasn't always followed the USCIRF's recommendations. In December 2019, Mr. Pompeo designated nine countries including "Burma [Myanmar], China, Eritrea, Iran, North Korea, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan" that were on the recommended list, and put others like "Comoros, Russia, Uzbekistan, Cuba, Nicaragua, Nigeria, and Sudan to its 'Special Watch list', but left out Syria, Vietnam and Central African Republic, which were also on the USCIRF's list.

The Office of International Religious Freedom (IRF) in the State Department and the USCIRF were created by the American "International Religious Freedom Act of 1998", but are separate entities and the USCIRF's recommendations are non-binding on the State Department.

However, according to the State Department website, the U.S. Secretary of State, who makes the final recommendation on whether to designate a country as a CPC, “takes into account” the recommendation made by the USCIRF.

(With inputs from

Kallol Bhattacharjee)

Subscribe to The Hindu digital to get unlimited access to Today's paper

Already have an account ? [Sign in](#)

Find mobile-friendly version of articles from the day's newspaper in one easy-to-read list.

Enjoy reading as many articles as you wish without any limitations.

A select list of articles that match your interests and tastes.

Move smoothly between articles as our pages load instantly.

A one-stop-shop for seeing the latest updates, and managing your preferences.

We brief you on the latest and most important developments, three times a day.

*Our Digital Subscription plans do not currently include the e-paper ,crossword, iPhone, iPad mobile applications and print. Our plans enhance your reading experience.

To continue enjoying The Hindu, You can turn off your ad blocker or [Subscribe to The Hindu](#).

[Sign up for a 30 day free trial.](#)

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com